



News Release

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Youth suicide prevention plan offers guidance to intervention

OLYMPIA — Washington's youth suicide rate remains higher than the national level, and the state is taking steps to turn that around. A new statewide plan offers tools and resources to help keep young people in Washington from taking their own lives.

Washington's Youth Suicide Prevention Steering Committee developed "[Washington State's Plan for Youth Suicide Prevention](http://www.doh.wa.gov/preventsuicide)" (www.doh.wa.gov/preventsuicide). The committee includes suicide experts and health professionals from across Washington.

"It's a tragedy whenever a young person commits suicide, or hurts themselves trying to do so," said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. "We hope that Washington residents will see this plan as a guide to prevent youth suicide in their communities. It's not any one agency's plan. It's a plan in which everyone wanting to prevent youth suicide can find a place for their work."

On average, slightly more than two youths in Washington kill themselves each week. About 17 more are hospitalized after suicide attempts. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Washington youth. Nearly twice as many suicides as homicides kill people between 10 and 24 years old. Our state's youth suicide rate is higher than the national average. Between 2002 and 2006, the rate was 8.3 per 100,000 in Washington. This compares to a 7.0 average for the nation.

However, suicide can be prevented. The new plan provides a framework for individuals, organizations, communities and agencies to end these tragedies. For instance, anyone who knows a youth is considering an immediate suicide attempt should call 911. People who see warning signs should contact a mental health professional or call 1-800-273-TALK for a referral.

The plan gathers up-to-date information and statistics. This includes information from a variety of state and national sources, including the most recent [Washington Healthy Youth Survey](http://www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/healthy%5Fyouth%5F2008/) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/healthy%5Fyouth%5F2008/>) of school students.

— More —

The document identifies warning signs and risk factors for teen suicide, as well as factors that can protect against it. Warning signs include a previous suicide attempt, current talk of suicide or making a plan, and a strong wish to die or a preoccupation with death. Others are giving away prized possessions, signs of depression, increased alcohol and/or other drug use, and hinting at not being around in the future or saying goodbye.

It also identifies the economic cost to society. For example, the 120 youth suicides in Washington each year cost an estimated \$231 million in medical bills and lost productivity. The 892 hospitalizations cost an estimated \$18 million.

The plan has five goals:

Goal 1— *Suicide is recognized as everyone's business.*

Goal 2— *Youth ask for and get help when they need it.*

Goal 3— *People know what to look for and how to help.*

Goal 4— *Care is available for those who seek it.*

Goal 5— *Suicide is recognized as a preventable public health problem.*

“Washington State’s Plan for Youth Suicide Prevention” was developed under the leadership of the Department of Health’s Injury and Violence Prevention Program. It was funded by a grant from the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration.

You can get a [copy of the plan](http://www.doh.wa.gov/preventsuicide) (www.doh.wa.gov/preventsuicide) online, or by calling the program, 360-236-2800. If you are concerned about a youth who may be depressed or suicidal, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or [find help](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org) on its Web site (www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for a healthy dose of information.
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